

The Editor's Perspective

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The Editor's Perspective

IT IS NOT UNUSUAL these days to hear the claim that the most widely shared venue for story telling in our culture—the myth maker for our time, in other words—is film. Even those few of us who don't see the latest blockbuster movies—*The Matrix*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *E.T.*, *Star Wars*—probably know the stories they bear. If movies are the common cultural coin of the realm, we should pay closer attention to the stories they tell. And if we're interested in a particular place—Iowa, let us say—we should ask what stories movies tell about that place. To begin to do that, we need—just as we need to compile a bibliography of relevant material before we begin a study of a particular topic—a list of the relevant films: a filmography.

That, in short, is why we have included an unusual feature in this issue of the *Annals of Iowa*—the filmography compiled by Marty Knepper and John Lawrence. We hope that their list of films with significant references to Iowa will begin some conversations about how Iowa is portrayed in a significant segment of cultural communication—and about how those portraits relate to actual historical experience in Iowa. That is serious work that is seriously needed.

But that's not the whole story. Along with the vital information about each of the films that Professors Knepper and Lawrence identified, they include brief plot summaries. It's clear from their witty summaries that they had fun doing this project, especially as they identify Hollywood stereotypes about Iowa. For example, they wonder whether the people responsible for naming an Iowa film character Tater confused Iowa with Idaho; whether having a character return to Iowa from India after Indian food has destroyed his liver is a comment on the blandness of Iowa food. And they conclude that the film *Joe's Apartment* "suggests that roaches, allied with a decent Iowan, would rule the world more benevolently than native New Yorkers."

If Professors Knepper and Lawrence had fun compiling the filmography, I've had fun reading and rereading it as I edited

and proofread it. That makes me believe that you will enjoy browsing through it, too. I hope it's not heresy to suggest that reading the *Annals of Iowa* can be fun!

As you discover new films and recall forgotten references to Iowa in familiar ones, you may want to add many of them, as I did, to your list of videotapes to look for. As you view, or re-view, those films, pay attention to the actual place that they reflect and the mythic place that is being created.

—Marvin Bergman, editor

P.S. I wrote an "Editor's Perspective" for the last issue, but forgot to include it. The gist of it was to encourage those of you who enjoyed Timothy Mahoney's article in that (Fall 2002) issue to look for the recent special double issue (Summer/Fall 2002) of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*. That issue is dedicated entirely to the 1856–1859 journal of John F. Duncombe, a brash young Democratic lawyer on the ground floor of the settlement of Fort Dodge. As it turns out, Duncombe crossed paths with George Wallace Jones, the Democratic politician and speculator who played a key role in Mahoney's story about early Dubuque.

In the summer of 1857 Duncombe joined Jones for what Duncombe characterizes as a pleasure excursion. The trip was almost certainly also related to both men's involvement with the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad, which was slotted to pass through Fort Dodge and of which Jones was chairman of the board. In the presence of the small but formidable Jones, the usually brash Duncombe played the sycophant—even in his private journal. He also confirms that Jones was, as Mahoney says, "a skilled player in cultivating camaraderie and fraternity," for Duncombe clearly revels in Jones's company. Duncombe describes Jones as "one of those free open hearted honorable freemen, who loves his friends like Angels, and hates his enemies like Devils. . . . One to whom you can trust the smallest and greatest business with the perfect assurance that it will be attended to."

Look for this fascinating diary by an articulate young man on the make in frontier Fort Dodge in *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*.

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